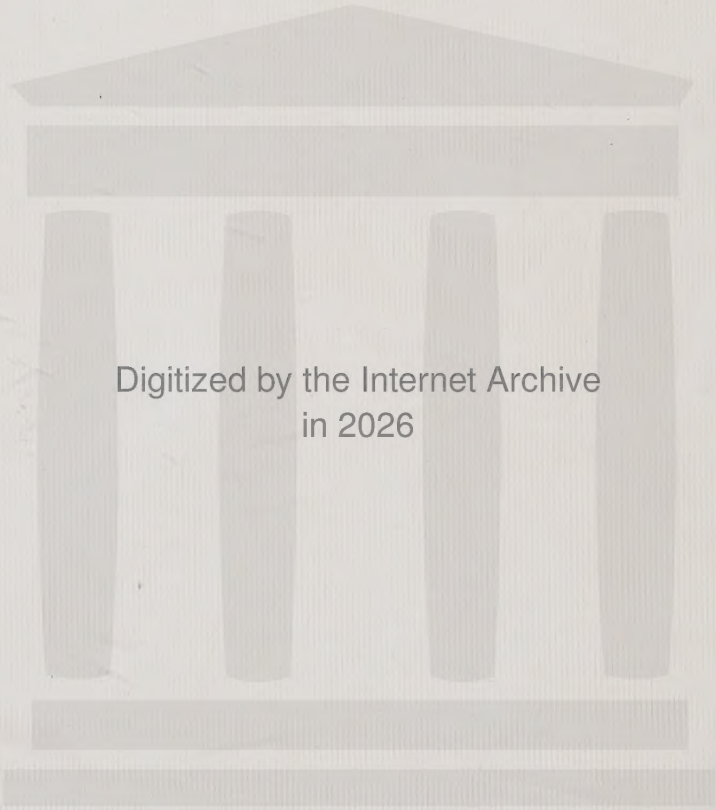
A SKETCH OF SHAKESPEARE

BY W. LEIGHTON.



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A SKETCH OF SHAKESPEARE.

I have, in this rough work, shap'd out a man,

Whom this beneath world doth embrace and hug

With amplest entertainment.

TIMON OF ATHENS.

A SKETCH

OF

SHAKESPEARE.

BY

WILLIAM LEIGHTON:

AUTHOR OF THE "SONS OF GODWIN," "CHANGE" &C.

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PREFACE.

THIS little volume has been made up, by request of friends, from the substance of three addresses read to the Wheeling Shakespeare Club upon the anniversaries of the poet's birth, in 1875, '77, and '79.

In consolidating these, certain local allusions, which were interesting only on the occasions that gave rise to them, have been omitted; and some new matter, mostly in the way of illustration of the original thoughts, has been added: but so little change has been made in the form of the composition that it still retains the desultory character permissible in its first purpose, and lacks the systematic arrangement and thoroughness which should belong to a critical essay.

It will therefore be understood that here is no elaborately digested biography containing the result of careful research of original authorities, nor an exhaustive analysis of the genius of Shakespeare, which would be a more ambitious effort than is here attempted; but simply a tribute of respectful admiration to the greatest poet of our language, with a brief sketch of his life and an endeavor to set down some of the plain and obvious reasons why we honor and admire him, and why the world has accorded to him the highest place in its literature.

With this explanation, the author must be content; but asks that enthusiasm in his subject be permitted to stand, in some degree, as an excuse for the book.

May, 1879. W. L.

PROMETHEUS OF THE DRAMA.

Around Orestes crazed, the Greek of old,
Terrors sublime of tragedy, unrolled;
While Art delighted touched his skilful hand,
And graceful shapes came forth at her command;
Grandeur and grace their mingling lines allied:
The cloudy brow of thought, the lip of pride,
Passion's wild eye, soft Pity's pleading tear,
Anger's clinched hand, Ambition's brandished spear—
While, over all, mysterious terrors glare
When fierce Erinyes toss their hissing hair.
Their artist pose, those ancient figures keep;
No flitting dream disturbs their marble sleep;
No quick, Promethean spark is kindling there
To send its flash across their stony stare.

As in the stately Pantheon row on row
Of marble gods looked down on men below;
So from their ancient pedestals on high
Look down on us, in deaths' mute fixity,
The olden dramas. But a heavenly flame
Descended, and a new Prometheus came:—

Behold him fettered like the god of old
With cruel chains whose iron shackles hold
His struggling life, while on his entrails feed
The ravening eagles of each hungry need!
Yet with hot impulse in his fiery soul
A Titan's passion writhes beneath control—
Then Shakespeare's genius woke cold Drama's life
As once Pygmalion won his statue-wife.

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CHAPTER I.

On some of the circumstances of the life of Shakespeare.

It is a theory now universally received, that the development of art, literature, and science depends, not so much on isolated, individual effort, as on the condition of the general mind. The operation of the movement of mind in any given direction may be briefly sketched in this way. The active energies of the more cultivated minds so act upon the aggregate mind of the world that a general interest is awakened in the subject thus presented. This general interest, moulding and modifying every individual to whom it comes, incites to greater or less progress according to capacity or constitution. Thus it chances at length to light up and stimulate, in some happily constituted organization, a creative power capable of wonderful progress—a power which would not have been aroused to action, but for the prevailing interest in such direction, and the consequent susceptibility of the world to be acted on by its force.

So it is ever the aggregate progress that produces individual progress, although the latter may proceed so far, under the impulse of its exciting cause, as to reach a development, to the height of which the aggregate progress may never arrive—may never arrive, because progress is not always constant, and peculiarly gifted minds have often power to advance far beyond the point at which the general progress halts, or turns to retrograde movement. Although such progress of the individual has undoubtedly the effect to hasten the advance of all, yet to bring up the general mind in any direction is

a slow and tedious work, and may not be largely accomplished by a few brilliant examples; but by the constant action of the larger and more rapid minds upon the smaller and slower.

These thoughts belong to the consideration of one of the marvels of the world's history, who, undoubtedly the offspring of an age of uncommon literary excitement, exhibited such brilliant example of individual effort, and accomplished such magnificent success, that, after three hundred years of constant general progression, the world yet sees his works apparently as unapproachable as in the day when they issued from his brain, master-pieces of skill, power, beauty, imagination, and philosophic grasp of thought.

On the gently flowing stream of Avon, in the heart of England, in the midst of beautiful, rural scenery, undisturbed by the din of workshops, or the turmoil of business, and undisfigured by the black smoke of factory chimneys, the little village of Stratford, in 1564, was composed of a few thatched cottages clustered about a magnificent church and stately stone bridge of fourteen arches. The whole population probably did not exceed fifteen hundred people who were mostly engaged in agriculture or the simple trades of a rural community. In one of these little cottages dwelt a young burgess and town magistrate, well to-do and well respected in his little community, and now rejoicing at the birth of his first son who, on the 26th of April, was christened and named William Shakespeare. Tradition has assigned the 23d as his birth-day, probably because it was a general, though not universal, custom to christen a child on the third day after its birth.

John Shakespeare, the father of the poet, was of the class styled in that time and land, yeoman; the son of a farmer who tilled lands in Snitterfield, a village adjoining Stratford, and rented his little farm of Robert Arden, a gentleman untitled, but of a family boasting of blood and lineage, their pedigree extending beyond the Con-

queror, back to the reign of Edward the Confessor. John Shakespeare, a farmer's son, a glove-maker by trade, married the daughter of Robert Arden, a gentleman—married the fair Mary Arden, a lady and an heiress. How this marriage came about tradition is silent, but it was doubtless a love-match, the work of mischievous Cupid, who is often guilty of overlooking the distinction of class. But though John Shakespeare had no line of distinguished ancestry of which to boast, he was a thrifty, progressive man, who, not content with enhancing his dignity by having a lady-wife, sought to build himself up to respectable position by acts of integrity and by honorable character.

The pedigree of the Ardens has been often quoted to prove the good blood of Shakespeare, in a land where descent from noble or titled ancestry has been always the proud boast of all who could possibly discover such descent; but it remains to be proven that the great poet drew his distinguished qualities rather from the noble Ardens, than from the yeoman race of his paternal line. The pride of ancestry was naturally fostered in a country whose very form of government rested on ancestral claims; and where hereditary rank was the custom and the rule. It was an Englishman of a later day, who made one of the characters of his romantic drama express this republican sentiment: "Not to the past, but to the future, looks true nobility; and finds its blazon in posterity." Thus might John Shakespeare have spoken in the day when he saw his own son more illustrious than any high-born ancestor of the line of Arden.

Of the early life of the young Shakespeare little authentic information can be gleaned. Like other youths of his village, he attended the "Free Grammar School," where he could have learned, and doubtless did learn, Latin and some Greek, a little English too, but probably not much; for, in the ordinary grammar school of that time, but little English learning was taught. He never was a learn-

ed man according to the opinions of the most erudite scholars of the time. Let us consider in what such learning was judged to consist. A thorough knowledge of Greek and Latin authors, derived from their diligent study in the original languages; some acquaintance with Eastern language and literature; a thorough training in all the schools of philosophy, ancient and modern; a knowledge of modern languages and literature, and, at least, a superficial acquaintance with science. All this went to make up a learned man; but, as was most emphatically proven in Shakespeare's case, so much learning was not necessary to produce a great poet, philosopher, and dramatist.

At Stratford, near the chapel of the Guild, was Great House or New Place, built by Sir Hugh Clopton, and, in Shakespeare's youth, the residence of John Combe, a wealthy gentleman. Clopton House, a fine residence, was only two miles away. Charlecote, a country-seat, built by Sir Thomas Lucy, was four miles in another direction; Warwick Castle was nine miles, and the famous Kenilworth, fourteen miles from Stratford. There was then the possibility that the youthful Shakespeare might have had, at one of these fine residences, access to a library where the rich treasures of literature were at his command. With the eager thirst of young and ardent desire, and the wonderful grasp and capability of his broad mind, what fields of literature might he most joyously have rambled over, storing his memory with thoughts, fancies, facts, and philosophies, to be recalled at a later day to embellish his own greater and more marvelous works!

A knowledge of literature, thus acquired in the seclusion of some great library, with himself for his own teacher, may not have constituted learning in the sense such word is used by the fastidious scholars of his day, such as Bacon, Sidney, or Ben. Johnson; but it might have been suitable training for the admirable work

he was destined to accomplish. If he had received the more exact discipline of the schools, it is possible that the exuberance of his fancy might have been checked by his endeavor to adapt his thoughts to classic or antique models, and his great conceptions dwarfed by confining them within the exact and measured rules of composition, laid down by well established authorities. From this he was perhaps saved by a desultory course of reading, which was also sufficient to greatly enrich a mind of wonderful comprehension and most rapid perceptions. Although the French and Italian languages were not taught at the Stratford grammar school, yet, of these, Shakespeare seems to have had some knowledge, which might have been self acquired, at least as far as reading is concerned, and easily so acquired, by a mind as wonderfully rapid as was that of the young poet.

To fill up with more detail the meagre outlines of the youth of Shakespeare, let me refer to a scene at which he must have been present, although neither history nor tradition record the fact. At the Castle of Kenilworth, in 1575, Robert Dudley, the magnificent Earl of Leicester, entertained his queen, the royal Elizabeth, with splendid festivities, lasting through seventeen days. Here, while the great earl coquetted with his intellectual, but vain, fickle, and dangerous mistress, and, in the sun of her smiles, dreamed himself monarch of England, pageants and plays were enacted with gorgeous dress and brilliant trappings, ingenious machinery and skilful dialogue, to honor, in the then fashion of the age, the great occasion. Sir Walter Scott, in his romance of *Kenilworth*, has admirably described all this; and while we pore over his enchanting pages there rises before us the impressive scene of the great queen's reception. We see the flashing light of two hundred torches in the hands of as many armed horsemen. We see the train of glittering nobles and beautiful ladies, with England's Elizabeth and the princely Leicester

at their head, the giant porter at the gate, the pageant of the Lady of the Lake and her attendant train of Tritons and Nereids mounted on fanciful sea-horses; and, in imagination, behold, dimly flitting in the shadowy back-ground, the sad face of the wretched countess, the beautiful, but unfortunate, Amy Robsart, a disguised fugitive in the castle of her lordly husband. Thus, bewitched by the glamour of this most romantic scene, we forget that history declares, the earl's fair countess died fifteen years before the date of these famous revels, in the lonely mansion of Cumnor.

But what Sir Walter does not describe let us imagine, and the thought must awaken a fresh train of romantic ideas. Among the glad throng that welcome the royal party, a handsome boy, with a thousand fancies flashing from his thoughtful eyes as he contemplates, with all a poet's comprehension, the romantic beauty of the scene, all splendid, weird, and magical; to his inexperienced eye like the brilliant enchantments of which he had read in the quaint pages of old Sir Thomas Malory. Thus, while the light of dancing torches and the huge bonfires on the castle walls flash in his eyes, he strives, in vain bewilderment, to think that it is real. This is not mere idle fancy—it must have been the fact. As Stratford is but fourteen miles from Kenilworth, young Shakespeare, then eleven years of age, must have been present at these great revels, a much interested spectator, if not an actor in the numerous pageantries. Perhaps already his thoughts were flowing in verse, and his boyish lips may have repeated his youthful poetry to the great queen who afterward so highly commended his maturer efforts. Here the young poet may have known his first dramatic inspiration, and received the impress of ideas that would haunt his mind through youth and early manhood until at length the opportunity came to develop the latent ambitions here created. But this is lingering, perhaps too long, over a period of the poet's life undefined by posi-

tive facts, though surely possibilities warrant speculations such as these.

While thus the boy Shakespeare was preparing himself for his great destiny, his father was abandoned by prosperity, and fell, by degrees, into low fortunes. How his property was dissipated we do not know, except that a numerous family were dependent upon him. It may have been an effort to live after the manner of his wife's family rather than of his own yeoman ancestry, that impoverished his fortune. Instead of exercising the office of a bailiff, as was formerly his duty, he was now haunted by bailiff and by writ. He was now, says one authority, a small dealer in wool. Another declares that he was a butcher; and, in either case, assisted by his son.

We now reach the date of 1582; and Will Shakespeare, at eighteen years of age, is the lover of Anne Hathaway, a farmer's daughter without mental culture, without the capacity to understand mental culture, and eight years the senior of her boy-lover. Let us imagine the author of *Romeo and Juliet*, of *Antony and Cleopatra*, sighing out his impassioned soul at the feet of his mistress. What woman could have resisted him? Anne Hathaway did not; and in December 1582 they were married. Doubtless Shakespeare loved most impetuously, for he had fervor and energy of passion in his heart beyond example, as shown in his great dramas. And doubtless Anne Hathaway loved; for she had a lover more gloriously endowed with grace of mind and luxuriant fancy, than ever had woman before or since; and though the opaque veil of her own uncongenial thoughts may have hidden his graces from her unintellectual mind; yet she must have seen the reflection of his beauties of intellect in the admiration of his more sympathetic companions. It is very natural for a shallow-minded character, as tradition and circumstance induce us to believe Anne Hathaway to have been, to admire and love one whom she perceives to be the object of admira-

tion of those around her, whose minds she feels to be above her own. Such love, however, is not the love that endureth through a life.

In this case the marriage may have been an unfortunate one, in so far as its purpose, of conferring happiness on the two parties most immediately interested, is considered; but, to the world—if it alienated the poet from domestic ties, and thus forced his thoughts to find, in literature, his more congenial mistress, and drove him, perforce, into the position best calculated to develop his genius,—this ill-sorted union may have been the reverse of unfortuate. Often the tempest that wrecks individual happiness confers upon the world incalculable benefits, and it is possible that this was so with Shakespeare in his hasty, improvident marriage. His wife had grace of person, but her mind had not the grace to comprehend her poet husband; while he, filled with constant yearnings for sympathy with his ardent imaginings, which met with no response, had no practical experience of life, nor sufficiently matured judgment, to properly direct his great abilities, and successfully meet the immediate, ordinary wants of life. Anne Hathaway should have married a ploughman, and Shakespeare should have married—well, he should *not* have married, probably.

Not yet twenty-one years old, his father impoverished, a wife and family to support, Shakespeare found hard labor an imperious necessity. His character of mind and education, though suitable for a poet, were very unsuitable for the occupations in which he was now compelled to toil. It was the old story of Pegasus in harness, a glorious steed to ascend Parnassus, but utterly useless for the heavy drudgery of this village life. Discouragement drove him from the path of dull labor, which his uninterested mind had not patience to follow; and, with idle or vicious companions, he indulged in idle or vicious amusements.

Tradition tells of a nocturnal adventure in Sir Thomas Lucy's park, and accused of, and threatened with punishment for, deer-stealing, Shakespeare is said to have retorted with a sarcastic and indeed scurrilous lampoon which he had the audacity to fix upon the gates of Sir Thomas' park. This deer-stealing adventure is strongly insisted on by tradition, and the verses also, but the latter may have been the invention of some companion-poet of the village, who afterward screened himself from danger behind his more generous friend. In spite of the gross character of the lines, however, there is something in them that smacks of Shakespeare, especially a whimsical connection of the knight's name with a word of similar sound, a common word-trick with our poet.

If this anecdote is authentic,—as we have reason to believe; though its authenticity has been assailed by the criticisms of scholars who have been unable to discover, or unwilling to acknowledge, in the coarse bitterness of its verse, the hand that wrote with such elegance and grace the drama of the *Tempest* and the tragedy of *Macbeth*,—it clearly shows that young Will Shakespeare had already acquired the reputation of a verse-maker, for he was at once suspected as the author of the scurrilous composition, and compelled to leave his native town to escape the rage of the irritated knight. So, to avoid the consequences of this escapade, Will Shakespeare went up to London; and, as far as authentic history is concerned, we there lose him for at least six years.

What was his first occupation in the great metropolis, and how he became connected with the stage, are now matters of conjecture, concerning which many unauthorized stories have been told. There is a one, that his first occupation in London was holding horses at the door of the play-house; but, as this can be traced to a recent origin, it is unworthy of belief. The popular idea has been

that he immediately commenced his apprenticeship to the stage, but this is by no means certain.

Whoever follows the fortunes of this gifted youth, can imagine for himself the beginning of his career in London. We may picture it something like this:—Shakespeare had a kinsman, formerly resident of Stratford, but at the time of the poet's "hegira" in the year 1585–6, a London attorney. Arrived in London, Will Shakespeare would naturally have sought out his kinsman for aid and advice in obtaining an occupation by which he might gain a livelihood and something to send to his wife and children left destitute at Stratford. But for a raw country-boy to find profitable employment in the great city, might have been very difficult, and we can imagine our youth, disappointed of other work, settling down to the duties of an attorney's clerk in his cousin Greene's office, even if he had not received the offer, or made choice, of such position at once. His knowledge of law-terms has often excited the wonder and admiration of modern critics, and it has been declared that only a lawyer could use such terms so accurately as they are found in his poems. In his cousin's office, employed in making copies and drafts of legal documents, for which his knowledge of Latin well fitted him, and in which he would soon have become proficient from his quick perceptions and acute mind, we can easily understand how his memory became stored with legal phraseology which would afterward flow freely and correctly from his pen when his mind was busied in dramatic composition.

Lawyer Greene had a brother, or cousin, Thomas Greene, who, in 1586, was a member of a company of actors, known as "The Lord Chamberlain's Servants," to which company Shakespeare afterward became permanently attached. Thomas Greene was an actor of some repute, also a play-writer; and, by his influence, Shakespeare could have obtained employment for his evenings in some in-

ferior position on the stage which, for one of his poetic temperament, must have had great attraction. Thus may have passed the young man's life: busy during the day in the attorney's office, and, in the evenings, on the stage, doing the very small parts, but learning rapidly and thoroughly the minutiæ of dramatic representation and all the requirements and possibilities of the theatre.

As an actor, Shakespeare never acquired great proficiency, perhaps because he soon discovered that he had more ability to dramatize than to act. It has been related that he never reached a higher rank, as actor, than to play the part of the *Ghost* in his own tragedy of *Hamlet*. His literary ability must soon have induced him to put together dramatic scenes. This ability, becoming apparent, he would be set to adapt old compositions to present wants, to re-write scenes to suit certain peculiar circumstances: the step from this to the construction of a complete and original drama could have been easily taken; and that drama once presented to the public, the world thus placed in sympathy with the poet's conceptive and fancy-lighted mind, the encouragement of success would have led to further efforts.

As early as 1592, Shakespeare had left the lawyer's office,—if indeed he had ever been employed there, as there is surely good reason to believe,—and about this time, or soon after, produced, besides his poems of *Venus and Adonis* published in 1593, and *Lucrece* in 1594, *King Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Richard II*, perhaps also *Romeo and Juliet* and *All's Well that Ends Well*. He was growing famous, as the author of such works must needs have been.

Spenser, then in high favor at Court, and arisen to quick celebrity by the publication of the first three books of the *Faerie Queene*, generously paid to the rising dramatist, in his poem, *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*, published in 1594, this high compliment:

"And there, though last not least is Ætion;
A gentler shepherd may no where be found;
Whose muse, full of high thought's invention,
Doth, like himself, heroically sound."

The queen, delighted by his flattering verses and exquisite compliment in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was pleased to honor him by her approbation, and did him the further grace to suggest a subject for his dramatic skill. There is also a very pretty story of the queen and Shakespeare, told in this way. The poet was enacting the part of a king. At that time people of distinction were in the habit of passing over the stage during dramatic representations. The queen, in so passing, bowed to the actor who did not return her salutation, but went on with his rendition of character. To ascertain if she could cause him to drop his assumed character, the mischievous lady again passed, and at the same time allowed her glove to fall at his feet. Shakespeare immediately picked it up, and returned it to its royal owner with these impromptu lines added, without an instant's deliberation, to the speech which he was just reciting:

"And though now bent on this high embassy,
Yet stoop we to take up our cousin's glove."

The intellectual queen was of course highly pleased with the poet's skill and readiness, and expressed her delight by a royal compliment. In this connection may be mentioned a complimentary letter said to have been written by King James to Shakespeare on the occasion of the production of the tragedy of *Macbeth* and referring to the prophetic vision of kings that greeted the Scottish usurper, as the descendants of Banquo.

Whether Shakespeare ever received more substantial favors from his crowned auditors than empty compliments, we are unable to determine. He had, however, in the Earl of Southampton, a munificent patron, if the story be true, that, at the building of the

Globe Theatre in 1594, he received, as a gift from the earl gratified and complimented by the dedication to him of the poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* which had become at once exceedingly popular, the sum of a thousand pounds, an amount equal, taking into account the change of values which has occurred in three hundred years, to perhaps thirty thousand dollars, which the poet invested as his share in the new theatre.

As Shakespeare's plays were now produced in rapid succession, and met with the most enthusiastic success, his fortunes became exceedingly prosperous, and his reputation thoroughly established. His full purse enabled him to remove the embarrassments that still oppressed his worthy parents; and he found means likewise to obtain, from the Herald's College, a grant of coat-armour, by which honest John Shakespeare was raised from the rank of yeoman to that of gentleman, much to the disgust of Sir Thomas Lucy who had driven the son from his native village, and who now entered his protest against ennobling the father. In 1597, William Shakespeare bought Great House or New Place, the most pretentious residence of his native town; but the death of his only son, Hamnet, about this time, destroyed the joyfulness of such improvement in his circumstances.

Near the beginning of the seventeenth century the famous Mermaid Club was founded by Sir Walter Raleigh, and tradition reports many witty sayings and doings by its distinguished members, one of which the great dramatist undoubtedly was. The encounters of wit between Shakespeare and Ben Johnson have been often referred to, and these doubtless took place when the members of this merry club were met at the Mermaid Tavern, in Bread street, to spend the night in joyous conviviality. There were assembled Sir Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Jonson, Dekker, Burbage, Selden, Colton, Carew, Donne, and many others, notable in

that age of literature and wit. We may imagine, but cannot fully realize, the joyous merriment that resounded in the old wainscoted parlor of the Mermaid, when Shakespeare pushed, with his quick wit and quaint conceits, the bewildered Jonson; and that slower worthy, his more ponderous wit quite disconcerted by the brilliant flashes of his rapid antagonist, sought by more labored and elaborate jokes, or some pedantic display of learning, to cover his discomfiture from his laughing companions. Then would Dick Burbage perpetrate some merry joke, or relate a humorous anecdote, or call on Fletcher for a song, on elegant Beaumont for a toast to some fair court-lady, or on Sir Walter for a tale of wild adventure on the seas, or bold descent upon the Spanish coasts.

About the year 1611, Shakespeare is supposed to have withdrawn from London, to live at his ease in Stratford, and enjoy the competence his skill and industry had acquired. Whether he continued to appear on the stage in the impersonation of characters until the time of his retirement to Stratford, we are unable to determine. One would suppose that the dignity of the author of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* would have suffered by playing such inconsiderable characters as he was accustomed to enact. *Hamlet* was probably written about the year 1600, first printed in 1603, in which year *Sejanus*, a tragedy by Ben Jonson, was produced at the Blackfriars, and the author of *Hamlet* played in it a subordinate part. So it is quite evident that Shakespeare did not hold his dignity as an obstruction to his duties as an actor; and that he continued on the stage after his fame as a poet and a play-writer had been largely established.

Perhaps he thought the training of constant contact with the necessities of the stage, as experienced by the actor, an important guide to the judgment of the play-writer, and the most effectual means to reduce his poetical conceptions and combinations within those laws and limits that control and contain, in their unity, a per-

fect drama. Poetic thought is apt to fly away from, and despise, all rules; but dramatic action depends for its success upon the strict observance of certain rules. To combine poetry and the drama, therefore, what better means can be used than to combine the poet and the actor, not indeed the principal actor who would be so much engrossed by the passion of the play that his outward observation would be limited, but a subordinate one who would be sufficiently impressed with the necessities of the stage, without being absorbed by the great theme of the action, and who would have the best opportunity of observation of both audience and dramatic movement?

And here it must be remembered that more skill is called for in the disposition and portraiture of minor parts of a drama, than of the principal characters; for poetic genius alone may force the latter along, but scarcely will suffice for the nice arrangement, combination, and artistic support of the former, where consummate skill and an experience of the stage are clearly indispensable. It has been often noticed that Shakespeare's minor characters have an individuality and a purpose that indicate great skill in the dramatist, and that they are seldom introduced for the simple purpose of relating some matter necessary to carry along the action of the play, as is of frequent occurrence with other dramatists. One character is placed as a foil, or an intensifier of another; and, while each is so delineated as to make it, in itself, an effective study, all are so combined and interlaced that their mutual effect is not fully realized until much study has been given, or they are produced in very careful representation, when, like the supporting parts of a finely imagined picture, the whole will present a masterpiece of art. Perhaps, for much of this skill of detail, Shakespeare was indebted to his experience as an actor.

Tradition says that, in his retirement, the great poet continued to write plays for the London Stage, and the *Tempest*, *Winter's Tale*,

and *Henry VIII* are supposed to have been produced during this retirement. The date of the production of each of his numerous plays is, however, a matter of much dispute, and Shakespearian scholars differ, sometimes widely, in such assignment. Thus, the *Tempest* has generally been assigned to the year 1611, or later, for various reasons: among others, Prospero's last words:

> "And thence retire me to my Milan, where
> Every third thought shall be my grave."

These lines have been supposed to refer to Shakespeare's retirement to Stratford, about 1611; but a German Critic, Dr. Karl Elze, writing in 1872, brings forward a variety of reasons to show that the *Tempest* must have been written in 1604, and that, moreover, about that time Shakespeare withdrew from the stage, and ceased to write plays, as a regular occupation. "At the same time," says Dr. Elze, "it need not be doubted that Shakespeare, even after this time, may have, once or twice, re-entered the service of the Muses; in other words, that the *Tempest* was not his last play."

Dr. Elze's reasons for assignment of date to the *Tempest* are too lengthy and elaborate to be considered here, but it may be said that there is a certain amount of specious argument displayed, though nothing to impress with the feeling of certainty. One is struck with the ingenuity of such reasoning, but at the same time feels a vague sense of indefiniteness, as the conclusions rest on internal evidence of the play, as above illustrated, style of versification, similitude of phraseology, and fancied relation of thoughts and ideas with the works of earlier or contemporaneous writers.

But indeed any assignment of date, founded on similar grounds, by the many critics who have busied their minds on this subject, is liable to the same objections that hold against the arguments of the German doctor, whose opinion has been here quoted on account of its bearing on the time of the retirement of our dramatist from the

London stage, which has generally been set at a later date by writers on this subject.

Rowe says: "The latter part of Shakespeare's life was spent, as all men of good sense will wish their's may be, in ease, retirement, and the society of his friends; that his pleasurable wit and good nature engaged him in the acquaintance, and entitled him to the friendship, of the gentlemen of the neighborhood." It is even reported that he was at length on pleasant terms of acquaintance with Sir Thomas Lucy, the son of his ancient enemy. That he was of a "sweet" and "gentle" disposition is the record of his whole life, and his companionable qualities were such as must have made his society much sought and enjoyed.

There is no record of large literary labors engaged in during his retirement; but such may, nevertheless, have taken place, as our information of this period of his life is exceedingly vague. When visited by friends, he gave himself up for the time to their society; and their remembrance of such visits was only of his pleasant company. But Stratford was too far away, in those days of slow traveling, to permit the frequent visits of his London friends, and these are the only ones to have transmitted to us any mention of his name. Thus the story of his retirement is untold. He never had, so far as we can learn, at any time of his life, a chum, adviser, or dear friend, into whose ear he could pour the ambitions and aspirations of his gifted mind—to whom he could go for literary counsel or sympathy. In all his career as a dramatist he stood alone, and apparently formed no literary partnership, as was much the custom of that time.

If, like Johnson, Shakespeare had found a Boswell to follow, like a faithful spaniel, his literary walks, his social rambling, his domestic retirement, the world need not have speculated to-day over the possibilities of his life. But, alas! Boswell was born to pour his

adulations upon one whom the world could better have left in darkness than the author of *Hamlet*, and the biography of the greatest of poets remains unwritten. In his own family there was no one of sufficient intellect to inform the world of his latest purposes, or to collect, and save from oblivion, his scattered papers, when, in the strength of his manhood, he was suddenly cut down by acute disease.

The death of the great poet and dramatist occurred on the twenty-third of April, 1616, just fifty two years after the supposed day of his birth. The Reverend John Ward who was vicar of Stratford in 1662, has left this record, made a half century after the event, and hence entitled to what credit the reader may allow: "Shakespeare, Drayton, and Ben. Johnson had a merry meeting, and, it seems, drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted." This is, of course, possible, as at that time hard-drinking undoubtedly occurred frequently, and both Shakespeare and Ben. Johnson were fond of conviviality; but the reverend gentleman's report must have been founded on tradition which was transmitted to him through village gossips, and the facts may thus have been grossly exaggerated.

Shakespeare was buried on the 25th of April, in Stratford Church; and above his grave, on the north wall, was placed a monumental bust of the poet in the act of writing. Beneath, on a flat stone covering his grave, is this inscription, said to have been written by himself just before his death:

GOOD FREND FOR IESVS SAKE FORBEARE,
TO DIGG THE DVST ENCLOASED HEARE:
BLESTE BE Ye MAN Yt SPARES THES STONES,
AND CVRST BE HE Yt MOVES MY BONES.

We learn by tradition and several, more or less authorized, por-

traits, that the personal appearance of Shakespeare was very prepossessing. Aubrey says the poet was "a handsome and well-shaped man." That his eyes were light hazel, and hair and beard auburn, we have reason to believe from such coloring of his monumental bust which was executed some time before 1623, and probably immediately after his death. There seems to be no foundation for the story of his lameness, which rests only on conjecture, and is first mentioned by Capell, an editor of the plays, who deduces it from the *Sonnets*:

> "So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,"
> SONNET XXXVII.
>
> "Speak of my lameness, and I straight will halt,"
> SONNET LXXXIX.

This language is of course figurative, but the story has been so frequently repeated that it now obtrudes itself upon us. Of the portraits of Shakespeare, the best authenticated is that published in 1623, on the title page of the First Folio, which bears at the corner of the plate the signature, "Martin Droeshout, sculpsit, London." Ben. Jonson attests the fidelity of this engraving as a likeness of Shakespeare, his friend and companion, in the following lines printed in the Folio, on the page opposite the portrait:

> "This Figure, that thou here seest put,
> It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
> Wherein the Graver had a strife
> With Nature, to out-do the life:
> O, could he but have drawn his wit
> As well in brasse, as he hath hit
> His face; the Print would then surpasse
> All, that was ever writ in brasse.
> But since he cannot, Reader, looke
> Not on his Picture, but his Booke.
> B. I. "

The bust over the poet's grave is a ruder work than the Droeshout print, and was made by one, Gerard Johnson, "a tombe-maker."

It is believed, however, that this workman,—he cannot be called an artist,—modelled his bust after a death-mask, as was the common practice of the period. The bust is of stone colored, as before mentioned, and bears some resemblance to the Droeshout print. It has been claimed that a death-mask of Shakespeare, probably the one used by Johnson, has been discovered in the possession of Dr. Becker of Hesse-Darmstadt, from which a portrait has lately been reproduced by Mr. William Page. There is also the Chandos portrait, an oil-painting, now in a ruined condition, in the National Portrait Gallery, South Kensington, London. Besides these, there are several other portraits which seem to be worthy of less consideration; but in no case can we be fairly sure that any likeness which has come down to us, is a true and worthy copy of the face of the great poet.

From all these, however, we have come to recognize a certain style of head and features as the Shakespeare face. There is the oval shape of countenance, high brow betokening not so conspicuously force of intellect as delicacy of thought and sublimity and liveliness of imagination, the tender, melancholy eyes, delicate mouth, and firm chin: in fact, a face capable,—so far as we can combine shape and expression with the wonderful thoughts of the great master,—of producing the plays.

Although we must always regret that we have not a likeness of Shakespeare by the hand of an artist of true genius, yet we cannot feel that his face has been lost. The possibilities that exist in the received idea of Shakespeare's face, are the best vouchers for its authenticity.

That the genius of Shakespeare was very fully acknowledged in his own day and generation, we have abundant proof; and that acknowledgment, each succeeding generation has repeated. As the world has progressed in knowledge, as literary works have vastly

multiplied, as new poets have arisen to gain a popularity brief or more enduring, it has become possible to more fully appreciate the great merits of Shakespeare's dramas, under the light of succeeding examples, than in the age that produced them. Thus Shakespeare's fame grows brighter as time goes on, and as literary examples are accumulated, by which to measure and illustrate him. In regard to that fame, however, the great poet exhibited an apparent disregard that critics now find quite unaccountable.

Smarting under the slights and privations that severely assailed the first half of his life, Shakespeare seems to have been ambitious of acquiring fortune and independent position; and, to gain these, used his wonderful intellectual abilities most diligently and constantly. The productions of his genius, the great creations of his imagination and fancy, as they accomplished his immediate design of procuring credit and fortune, seem to have been used for this purpose, and then cast aside by their author as unworthy of further care. He made no collection of his works, took no notice of their publication by others, and died without seeing the bright children of his creative brain rescued from oblivion by being fairly set in print.

There seems but one way of rationally accounting for this apparent disregard of the approbation of posterity, generally so highly valued by the poetic mind. We may explain it in this way. Anticipating much longer life, as his previous good health gave him sufficient reason to do, and finding judgment, skill, conception, and imagination ripening, as each successive drama was produced, the poet contemplated grander and more intellectual works than any that have come down to us; greater monuments of his wonderful power and skill. Constantly haunted by these more gigantic conceptions, he could naturally look with indifference on what had already been done, fully conscious that the undeveloped imaginings which were floating in his brain, had possibilities beyond all his ear-

lier works. In the presence of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*, we are inclined to shake the head in incredulity at the mention of grander, or more intellectual, works; but we must remember that *we* are not viewing literature with Shakespeare's mind.

The great poet's death was accidental, suspending his labors at the early age of fifty-two years. Had Milton and Dante died at a like age, the world would never have known their two great epics; for neither were completed when their authors had reached the age at which Shakespeare died. Our author toiled most industriously for position and fortune; these he had fully acquired in his busy half-century of active life. Might it not have been his thought and intention, to devote his remaining years, his ripe judgment, and matured skill to works that would have transmitted his name to posterity with even greater luster than gilds it now?

Dramatic composition was not considered in his day, and perhaps is not now, the highest branch of literature. Shakespeare may have meditated a great epic, and desired its splendor to be undimmed by the lighter literature of dramas by the same author. Hence he may have been content to suffer his dramas to perish. He may even have commenced his epic. As no papers were collected at his decease, though such papers must necessarily have existed, the large intents of his later years may have perished with his letters, fragmentary dramas, scraps of verse, unfinished scenes, notes, and memoranda, such as would naturally be left in the library of a great dramatist and poet at his death. Or they exist in some forgotten spot where chance or circumstance has placed them, and from which they may yet appear to challenge astonishment and admiration, and to complete the history of the greatest intellect that has left its stamp on the literature of the world.

Dr. Carl Elze, the German critic before referred to, claims, from certain reflections in the *Tempest* and *Sonnets*, that Shakespeare felt

the approach of age in declining force of mind and body, and he quotes from sonnet lxxiii to prove this assertion:

> That time of year thou may'st in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
> In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
> As after sunset fadeth in the west,
> Which by-and-by black night doth take away;
> Death's second self, that seals up all in rest. &c.

Such moralizing as this sonnet contains might come from a youthful mind transferring itself in imagination from youth to age, and must be held insufficient proof of actual old age in the author who, with a poet's license, might surely pass beyond the bounds of present condition. The "autumnal mood" which has been pointed out as pervading the *Tempest*, may likewise be regarded as an exhibition of the exquisite art of the dramatist, in surrounding his "autumnal" characters with a congenial atmosphere; and no more a portion of the author's self, than the superstitious shadow, that hangs over *Macbeth*, is an evidence that Shakespeare was haunted by the supernatural. There is nothing really tending to show declining powers of mind or body in our poet previous to his final, mortal illness. The plays assigned to his last years show no failing mind, but more finished execution, more careful combinations, and especially greater power and originality of conception, than his earlier work.

Shakespeare's apparent disregard for the fate of the poems and plays that were issued in his name, has been used as an argument by those who have sought to deny to him his right of authorship; but such argument seems to apply with even greater force against the claims of those who have presented Lord Bacon as the dramatist, as it cannot be proven that the philosopher and Lord Chancellor in any way sought to perpetuate the works in question, or had the least connection with their ultimate preservation.

Although the late Lord Palmerston held that these plays came from the brain of Lord Bacon, the idea was borrowed from this side of the Atlantic, and was first given to the world, in 1856, by Miss Delia Bacon, an American lady of much culture, but unfortunately of an unstable mind. Although an intense student of Shakespeare and Bacon and of all literature bearing on the lives or works of either, and a "passionate pilgrim" and sojourner at the birth-places and residences of both these illustrious men, the proof she sought could not be found. The vague resemblances and shadowy relations that first awakened her suspicions, were all the arguments that she could gather, to persuade the world into her belief. Tormented by perceiving that what she deemed relations the world called fancies, vexed and bewildered by the ridicule launched on her poor head, sadly overworked and weighed down by poverty, this unfortunate lady's unbalanced brain gave way. "The latent insanity was developed into phrenzy," and she became the inmate of an asylum. She never recovered her mind, and only returned to her country to die. But the magnetic power of a persistent belief is shown by tl e fact that her mad theory did not die with her. The world is prone to grasp at novelty; and it is scarcely possible to propose anything too extravagant for belief. The idea promulgated by this mad lady, is growing, year after year, into public notice. People of sense and understanding are found advocating it; and the great poet of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is in positive danger of being robbed of his laurel crown, in the opinion of many, unless, by some means, these crazy fancies can be argued, or laughed, away.

As Lord Bacon survived Shakespeare nearly ten years, and passed the last five in retirement and intellectual pursuits, what more simple and natural course could he have taken, if he had been the true dramatist, than have brought forward the proofs of his authorship, when such claim could have done no harm to the dead Shakespeare,

and when there existed no reason that can now be sensibly assigned, why he should not have done so, whatever might have been the restraining reasons of his youth? Then he could have revised the great plays, added explanatory notes where such were necessary, seen them carefully printed and published, and thus, by the luster of this late discovery, partially effaced from the remembrance of men the disgrace that closed his career as a statesman.

The chief reasons that have been brought forward to bolster up a claim for Bacon against the time-honored name of Shakespeare, are, that in an elaborate examination of their works, it has been found that the currents of their thoughts often run in similar channels, and the manner in which they group their ideas, and frequently their mental reasonings, are alike, presenting such points of similitude as would not be likely to occur accidentally. The explanation of this likeness will bring us back to the theory or proposition with which this chapter opened, viz: that the condition of the general mind is the exciting and directing cause of the development of individual progress. Thus occurs the coincidence of the two great minds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, acted upon by the currents of popular thought, but springing far beyond its average level, as they crystalized their great conceptions into imperishable literature, presenting the phenomena of constant reference to the common source from which their progress sprung, the popular direction and modes of thought of the age in which they lived.

CHAPTER II.

The works of shakespeare: their influence, purpose and literary excellence.

NOTABLE and somewhat famous in his own time, the writings of William Shakespeare, poet and dramatist, have grown into higher estimation since his death, until the world has come to recognize and acknowledge in him, not only the Master of Literature and greatest of poets, but a guide and leader in the realm of thought: and the broader the comprehension that now studies his works, the larger the measure of admiration it accords.

A child seldom reads Shakespeare with that large degree of pleasure which a mature mind derives from such perusal: fullness of judgment and intellect is required to properly appreciate the exquisite pathos, force, imagination, humor, passion, and philosophy, that are lavishly wrought into his greater dramas. Yet even a child can *feel* the presence of larger thoughts, a deeper passion, than he can realize, as he follows Hamlet or Macbeth through the psychological changes that mark the career of each.

As the lessons of the world are successively learned—as the ways and nature of humanity grow more familiar to us—as we become aware of the capacity and reach of our own minds, the depth of feeling in our own hearts—as we come to know that life

> "Is nobler than attending for a check,
> Richer than doing nothing for a bauble,
> Prouder than rustling in unpaid-for silk:

in brief, as we grow older, we find in Shakespeare, broadly deline-

ated, all the phases of life which we notice about us, or experience in ourselves; so that our admiration of him, whom we now find our ablest teacher, grows into love and respect, as to the pleasure of the imagination and charm of poetry is added the benefit of a larger, truer conception of the world of men, obtained by study of his works. In these plays is found, in highest perfection, whatever the mind would seek, whether it be passion, sublimity, philosophy, morality, humor, wit, any function of the intellect, or quality of the heart. The deepest thinker and the shallowest laugher drink from the same cup, and find each his peculiar exhileration in the draught.

In the study of the two sides of our human nature, emotional feeling and mental apprehension, I think it is safe to believe there are no written text-books better than Shakespeare's plays, where life is exhibited in the midst of its characteristic phenomena, as the diagnosis of the physician shows disease by the presence of its characteristic symptoms. Whoever can read *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* without feeling the sympathies of his heart stirred in its profoundest depths, and his intellectual nature incited to larger reaches of thought than come with the ordinary incidents of life, can scarcely expect to find in any book an emotional or mental stimulus, or any measure of himself; for in him imagination is such a sluggish thing that it has

> "No figures, nor no fantasies,
> Which busy care draws in the brains of men."

But where is such a man? Puck might circle the earth again and again, and spend many times "forty minutes" about it, nor find so unimpressible a piece of humanity. Imagination holds its sceptre over all mankind without exception; it even descends lower in the scale of being and exerts its power upon the brutes. A sleeping dog has his imaginations. Watch him as he moves his paws restlessly, curls back his lips, and growls at some phantom of his sleep, some invader of his dreams—

"Dreams
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy
Which is as thin of substance as the air,
And more inconstant than the wind, who wooes
Even now the frozen bosom of the north,
And, being anger'd, puffs away from thence,
Turning his face to the dew-dropping south."

The lover of fun is delighted at the vagaries and wit of Sir John Falstaff, Dogberry, Nick Bottom, Sir Toby Belch, Malvolio, and all the many humorous characters of the plays; but while thus intent only on the merry side of life, he is often insensibly drawn to more intellectual pleasures, and learns, perhaps in the midst of his merriment, that there is something better than laughter. Although fun is good and healthy, Shakespeare's especially so, and though it is, perhaps, a wise philosophy to laugh rather than look sad, to

"Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth,
Turn melancholy forth to funerals;"

yet we still remember that

"Mirth cannot move a soul in agony,"

and that "those that are in extremity of either,"—laughing or melancholy,—"are abominable fellows, and betray themselves to every modern censure, worse than drunkards."

So undoubtedly fun must yield the palm of supremacy in interest to the more noble pleasures of the intellect, arising from the glorious apprehension of thought and the wonderful range of imagination. We all love to laugh, for laughing is a thing essentially human; but we would not choose to be cast in laughing parts all our lives, to take up the profession of clowns or buffoons,

"And laugh like parrots at a bag-piper."

To laugh is the relaxation of nature from thought; but it is the thought that is the purpose of life, not the laugh; and we all feel

within us certain workings of humanity which subdue levity, and compel us to intense interest in every exhibition and delineation of the emotional nature of mankind, which we make our own by sympathy; and especially are we interested in the development of each intellectual faculty, because we recognize therein the great mental inheritance of men—all that makes them different from more perishable forms of matter—from the dust,—to use Hamlet's conceit,—that imagination may trace, passing from the kingly shape of Alexander, and serving many a baser purpose, till we find it stopping a beer barrel.

It may be that we have read the plays again and again, that the stories and characters are well known, that we can quote many passages, and that the words and verses follow each other with the smooth-flowing easiness that belongs to familiar poetry; but can we exhaust them? Is their wealth like the sweet material bees gather from the flowers, a certain fixed quantity, and that taken, the sweet-bearing blossoms only empty cups? Is it not rather like the scent of sandal-wood, a never-dying perfume that time is powerless to exhaust?

I believe that the effects of the beauties and the suggestive force of Shakespeare's great plays increase in their impression upon the mind the more familiar become the words and imagery of the scenes. As we study and learn by heart his works, insensibly we absorb into ourselves a part of the author; familiarity with the fine images and grand conceptions of his master-mind, so impresses our own minds that those images and conceptions become permanently fixed within us, and form an actual part of ourselves, influencing, perhaps much more largely than we are conscious, all our thoughts and actions.

Psychology is a theme which easily branches into the metaphysical; but nothing is surer than that the thoughts, which have found

expression in the past, affect continuously the present, and will extend indefinitely into the future, as mankind study and learn the lessons great minds and the events of history transmit, the largest legacy of the human race.

We are not alone what natural formation and the circumstances of our surroundings constitute; all the great Past stretches out innumerable lines of communication, connecting us, the living, with the many dead; so that what our ancestors and all the world's ancestors have been, helps to make us what we are. Especially minds of great conceptive and imaginative power often exert after death a greater influence upon the movement of the world of men than they did in life; and such has undoubtedly been the case with Shakespeare. Thought once impressed on the general mind by any popular form of literature, is a never-exhausted legacy to the race; it reaches generation after generation, not only by means of the original literature, but also by the harvests which spring from its seed in the generations through which it passes.

Thus it is impossible to measure the effect which Shakespeare's mind is exerting on the world to-day; that effect comes to us through so many modifications that we cannot trace its course; but it is safe to conclude that a portion, and perhaps not a small one, of every man's intellect, is a reproduction of some part of Shakespeare's. So great has been his influence upon the world, through literature and the drama, that a large part of what passes for original thought in this A. D. 1879, is but a reflection from him, a filtering of his thoughts through the world's thinkers during nearly three hundred years.

Therefore, whether we read and study his plays, or never look at them, we receive some part of their influence through the minds of those, living and dead, who have studied them. Is it not then a reasonable thing that we should go to the fountain-head from which

so great a stream of thought has come down the ages, and drink with thirsty minds from this intellectual spring, nor be content to take it by absorption from second hands?

To study Shakespeare's plays is to go to school to him; and the lessons he teaches are generally easy, and always interesting. He gives us hard work sometimes as he leads our minds into intricacies or profundities of thought, but he guides with such masterly control of all the intellectual elements, that we have generally surmounted the difficulty before we are fully aware of the greatness of the problem we are working. That we may not feel the fatigue of our intellectual exertions, he amuses us with his hearty humor and sparkling wit, excites us with his pictures of brilliant imaginings and charming conceptions, arouses our sympathetic emotions with skillful touches upon the pathetic chords of our hearts, and finally sends us home after each lesson wiser and better beings, creatures of larger thoughts and broader sympathies.

> We "may wander
> From east to occident, cry out for service,
> Try many, all good, serve truly, never
> Find such another master."

A correct taste in art is acquired and cultivated by constant study and examination of the best work of artists; and we find that we can return again and again to a fine picture with constantly renewed pleasure, and dream, at each visit, a new dream suggested by the appeal of art and beauty to the impressible mind. In precisely the same way, the study of Shakespeare's plays is greatly instructive, and the pictures they contain are always beautiful, always freshly suggestive to the imaginative mind. We cannot tire of them, for they come to us always with newly kindled thoughts; and the more we contemplate them, the more sensitive grow our minds to their impressions.

Concerning the meaning of Shakespeare's plays and the purpose of the author in their elaboration, and in the characterization of his people of the drama, much has been written ingeniously and learnedly, telling what profound and careful students have discovered in them. Not only every play, but every character, has been subjected to the closest analysis and criticism, and many subtle thoughts and specious theories have been developed, by which is made to appear that these dramas have another signification than is apparent in their obvious showing.

The critics, searching for subtle thought beneath the stories and characterization, have attempted to prove that each of these dramas is the philosophical development of a theme, every part resting upon a well-ordered scaffold of abstract thought, on which the author's skill has built up this outside show of beauty, as the fairest blossom is but the development of a seed, the germ of such flower life. Attempting to follow the critics in their intricate investigations, the mind often becomes bewildered, while there arises in the heart a feeling of regret when the flesh-and-blood Hamlet fades away, and, in his place, is set the impersonation of a philosophical idea which, though it may be very ingenious, does not so appeal to our sympathies and imaginations as did the melancholy Dane ere he was robbed of his human personality.

In the dramas of life which we see constantly going on around us, the apparent actors are persons and not ideas. If the drama of the stage would be a mimic of that of life, its actors should have independent personalities, not represent ingenious covers of impersonal ideas. In the dramas of life, the contact of character with character, under varying circumstances, startles and interests us with its unexpected developments and deviations from customary ways. These surprises of life make its chief interest and constitute the thrilling tragedies and amusing comedies. Drama presents pictures

of life which must be in accordance with what we know of it, or we are shocked or wearied, not interested or pleased. Personality is especially necessary to give the largest interest in the scene by our human sympathies with the joys, the woes, the laughter, or the tears, of its mimic life.

But when a play is divested of personalties, made the representation of a thought, an idea, a theme, sympathy no longer invests it with such interest, and its movement fails to touch the heart. In other words, the action of the play upon the audience is transferred from the heart to the mind; it becomes an ingenious literary composition perhaps, but no longer an enchanting tragedy or comedy. Shakespeare's compositions are, in an eminent degree, true dramas of life, and his characters, living men and women, who take their places with the real men and women of history; and, like such actual historical characters, exert their influence, by example and precept, upon their audience, the living men and women of the world. They claim and have our fullest sympathies.

If then the force of dramatic action depends upon real and intense personalities, is it not imputing lack of sagacity to the author of a drama to endeavor to show that he drew his characters not so much for their apparent action in the scenes as for the development of a theme, or to serve as types of ideas, supporters of an ingenious presentation approaching the character of allegory? As a literary effort, an allegory may be worthy of much admiration, but its merit is in another direction from the merit of a drama. Shakespeare's *Othello* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* have, each its own, peculiar beauties and merits; but the *Pilgrim's Progress*, on the stage, would not command the same attention, nor excite the same admiration as the play of *Othello;* yet perhaps the work of Bunyan has had as many readers and admirers as Shakespeare's *Moor of Venice.* The reason why the *Pilgrim's Progress* has not an assured place on the

stage is, of course, that allegory is unsuitable to produce such powerful stage effects as the legitimate drama. The point I wish to develop fully is that it may be held to be a defect in a drama to have an inner meaning beneath its imagery; and the great and continued success of Shakespeare's plays prove that they are not weakened by such defect or fault.

Let us then not go too far below the surface, nor explore with the diving-bells of theoretical criticism, profound depths beneath these plays, in search of abstruse, inner meaning. This super-critical analysis has been the favorite practice of many acute minds, and has had its ardent followers and admirers, especially among German students of our great dramatist, who have found, as they believe, in the writings of the poet, a reflection of the inner life of the man; and who claim to have first revealed Shakespeare, in his true greatness, to his own countrymen—

> "But men may construe things after their fashion,
> Clean from the purpose of the things themselves."

How much or how little truth may exist in such deeply drawn conclusions is too broad a subject to be examined here; but without a subtle, inner purpose, the plays of Shakespeare have a depth of meaning in their obvious and apparent lessons, sufficient to lead thoughtful and contemplative minds to the largest study of a philosophy that is bounded only by the unknowable; and they contain such grand array of beauties as to awaken admiration in those the least inclined to æsthetical reflection. Most lovers of Shakespeare are content with these obvious beauties so profusely spread before them. Admirers of nature should be satisfied to feast their eyes and hearts upon a lovely landscape, nor sully its contemplation with desire to dig beneath the surface of each beautiful scene in search of precious minerals. So may we be content with the glorious showing of life that Shakespeare gives us, his flow of imagination,

passion, and poetry, those fine touches of exquisite art, nature, or inspiration, that thrill all hearts by their pathos, grandeur, wit, or subtlety, their gentle graces, or their frightful terrors: and we may leave the hidden philosophies of these plays, if such there be, in the dark wells where they are said to lurk; finding that to grasp the outer and revealed thoughts, is a sufficient task for our intellectual powers, often calling for the largest exercise of mental comprehension. While then the deep miners labor in their search, let us enjoy the fragrance and the beauty of the perfumed buds, the delicious and graceful blossoms, that hang sweetly in the air above, rejoicing in bright promises, or the fullness of mature perfection.

There has been much inquiry and speculation concerning the chronological order of the plays; and the date of each has been determined by careful examination of various points of reference to contemporaneous writings and events, and also by reference in the works of other writers. In this way careful lists have been made, showing just how the plays have followed one another, with the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Comedy of Errors*, or *Love's Labor's Lost*, at one end, and *Tempest*, *Henry VIII*, or *Winter's Tale*, at the other. Besides this way of settling the order of their composition, a new method has more recently been devised, based upon metrical construction of the verse; and the order thus determined has been found to be very nearly in agreement with that established by evidence and reference.

In the earlier plays rhymes are abundant; *Love's Labor's Lost* contains 1028, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 731; while the *Tempest* has only 2, and *Winter's Tale*, none. The first plays contain few lines with superfluous final syllables; of these *Love's Labor's Lost* has only 9, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 29; while the *Tempest* has 476, and *Winter's Tale*, 639. These differences are so marked, as to establish the fact of a change in the author's

method; and a thorough examination of the versification of the plays soon convinces that, beginning with a free use of rhymes and with exact endings, the poet gradually dropped the use of rhyme, and adopted, or permitted himself to fall into, the habit of double-endings. There are few Alexandrines in the first plays: in the poet's middle period they are more abundant; but in the later plays they decrease in number though continuing to occur oftener than in the early plays.

These peculiarities of versification, indicating as they do habits of mind, are safe guides as to the general order of the plays; but can scarcely be used alone to determine positively the relative position of two plays written so nearly togather as within one or two years. They are also very interesting facts, as illustrating the progress of Shakespeare's mind in dramatic composition.

Later writers have essayed to perfect the works of Shakespeare, but such efforts have consisted chiefly of new arrangement of scenes, curtailments, and slight changes to suit what they deem the requirements of the modern stage. Colly Cibber has re-arranged, and revised, the play of *Richard III*, and his version is now usually put upon the stage in preferance to the original of Shakespeare. But what has he accomplished? Has he intensified the character of Gloster? Has he given it new traits? new lines of demarkation? Not at all; he has given it nothing; it is above his measure. His work is like a coat of bright paint put upon an old Greek statue; it mars, not beautifies; but cannot hide the grand proportions.

Two writers of large dramatic genius, at least so considered in their day, Dryden, the great poet—"with whom," Macaulay says, "died the secret of the old poetical diction of England"—and Sir William Davenant noted for his claim of relationship to Shakespeare, and also a poet-lauriate of England, united their labors to revise and alter Shakespeare's *Tempest*. What did they accomplish? The

only scenes really impressive in their version are those they did not touch, or altered little. They invented Sycorax, a sister of Caliban, a very common woman, and utterly lacking of that poetical monstrosity that marks her brother, as Shakespeare drew him. They invented Dorinda, a second daughter of Prospero, making her, as well as her sister Miranda whom they quite spoiled, two feeble sentimentalists, in accordance with the fashion of their day. They invented Hippolito—a man who had never seen a woman, having lived secluded from the world,—in whom nature is shown working in very questionable manner, in fact, warped to suit the prevailing sentiment of a sentimental age. Most of the new matter of their play is farcical; much of it commonplace; none of it grandly imaginative. As a specimen of its style and philosophy, this quotation:

Dorinda is sitting beside the wounded Hippolito, her lover, who has just been restored from a death-like swoon.

"DORINDA.

I will not leave you, till you promise me
You will not die again.

HIPPOLITO.

Indeed I will not.

DORINDA.

You must not go to Heav'n, unless we go
Togather, for I've heard my father say
That we must strive to be each other's guide:
The way to it will else be difficult,
Especially to those who are so young;
But I much wonder what it is to die.

HIPPOLITO.

Sure 'tis to dream, a kind of breathless sleep,
When once the soul's gone out.

DORINDA.

What is the soul?

HIPPOLITO.

A small, blue thing, that runs about within us.

DORINDA.

Then I have seen it, in a frosty morning,
Run smoking from my mouth."

Dryden's TEMPEST v. i.

Pardon this quotation which is given for the sake of illustration, and let us remember, and believe if we can, that it is the work of two really good writers, one of them often considered, after Milton, the greatest English poet between Shakespeare and Lord Byron. Let us compare with this, Shakespeare's profound philosophy and poetical imagery, in Prospero's words,—omitted by Dryden and Davenant in their version to make place for such puerile stuff as just quoted,—at the conclusion of the masque of Iris, Ceres, Juno, and nymphs:

"These, our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

The joint efforts of Dryden and Davenant to amend the *Tempest* resulted so weakly, that their production is forgotten, and is only mentioned here, because it shows, in a very striking manner, how completely unapproachable is Shakespeare in his creations. Even the emendation of difficult passages by the most careful scholars is a dangerous experiment; for it has often happened that what at first seemed a happy restoration of the author's meaning, has proven, in

the light of a broader or truer conception of the passage, a mistaking or narrowing of the poet's thought. A distinguished Shakespearian scholar has termed the text of the plays "*a still lion* that seems dead, but may be only sleeping, or indeed only shamming;" and liable, at any time, to average himself on whoever shall unwarily dare to presume on his stillness, and take unwarrantable liberties with him.

The printed copies of many of the plays could not, we know, have had the supervision of the author, and we have reason to believe that such may have been the case with all. Hence we are plagued with many blunders of the old printers who worked off the original copies in an age when the typographical art had not reached such perfection as now, Over these *cruces* Shakespearian students have carefully labored, intent on restoring the meaning hidden beneath errors of the types. So much wisdom, literary skill, ingenuity, and patient thought have been brought to bear on the text that its meaning has generally been made plain; but a few cases still remain to utterly baffle conjecture.

In this restoration of the text, many have been the disputes that have arisen between editors and commentators concerning the meaning of the author; and so much has been written in elucidation of the plays that Shakespearian literature has grown to immense proportions. The latest editions of Shakespeare's works contain, however, the condensed results of much of the mental labor thus expended, and so give the student of to-day a great advantage over the readers of the earlier editions, who were compelled to puzzle through each difficult *crux* as best they could, without the aid of the sign-boards that are now set up to tell what famous thinkers have believed the right way.

CHAPTER III.

An analytical glance at shakespeare's method and genius.

IN the midst of his enjoyment of Shakespeare the thoughtful student will sometimes stop to examine his pleasure, and seek to learn the method by which the great master built so high his art. In order to do this, he must, in imagination, enter the workshop of the poet, and inquire how he probably set about the manufacture of a play.

His stories, and often his characters, he did not invent. He found some popular, or obscure, tale or history, that suited his purpose, and followed its events often with scrupulous exactness. Take, as an example, the play of *Othello*. This is built upon a story by Giovambattista Giraldi Cinthio, an Italian author—a story that was translated into English by N. Parr in 1795: no earlier translation is known; but there may have been one in Shakespeare's time although no copy has survived. From such early translation, or from the original, our poet had the story of his play. This original is in itself rude and meagre, unadorned by the play of fancy or æsthetic art. To give even an abridgment of it would be tedious. It is enough to say that the circumstances of Othello's marriage are narrated, the departure to Cyprus, the scenes in which Iago awakens and excites Othello's jealousy, the contrivance of the former by which Cassio obtains Desdemona's intercession for him with her husband, the scenes where she pleads to the Moor for the lieutenant, the circumstance of the handkerchief, the attempted assassination

of Cassio and murder of Desdemona; in the manner of which last event the play departs from the original where that unfortunate lady is beaten to death with a stocking full of sand; but such clumsy means of death would not have comported with the dignity of Shakespeare's tragedy. He also makes a change in the conclusion, exposing the crimes of Iago, and presenting the suicide of Othello; by which poetical and moral justice bring punishment to crime, and the drama is given a concise and tragic end. So much for the story of *Othello*; it is not Shakespeare's but Cinthio's. What then is Shakespeare's? All that is charming and interesting in the play belongs to him. Cinthio's novel excites simply disgust at human depravity, with perhaps a sentiment of pity for the unfortunate victims. It is like the police-record of crime, bare and revolting particulars that make us shudder and strive to forget. The play of *Othello*, on the other hand, is an entrancing romance, a beautiful and highly-wrought poem, where the same horrors exist indeed as in the tale; but so skillfully managed; so lighted by bright fancies, brilliant imaginations, and lofty thoughts, that, like the shadows in a fine picture, they serve to bring out the lights in startling distinctness from their black and terrible background. Our hearts may be wrought to painful sympathy, our moral natures pained by the portrayal of, for a time, successful villany; but at the same time admiration, generous pity, and noble anger are awakened, and urged to such intensity that they reveal to us greatness and goodness in ourselves, of which we were not fully conscious till the wand of the great magician brought them forth with its ennobling touch—greatness and goodness which such lessons wake from idle apathy, and stir to useful purpose.

The play of *Othello* has delighted the most cultivated, virtuous, and artistic minds through nearly three centuries. We listen to it again and again, and though we know the scenes by heart, our at-

tention is chained, our sympathy and admiration excited, as when we first thrilled at the recital of its bewitching lines. No play perhaps is better known; quotations from its verse fall from the lips of the learned and the unlearned; every living man who speaks the English language feels an influence from it working imperceptibly in his heart, yet no play is more sure of drawing a crowded audience here, everywhere upon the English stage. It is new each time it touches our hearts, as the giant of old was fabled to renew his strength whenever he touched his mother, Earth. Meanwhile the original by Cinthio is forgotten; the student of Shakespeare reads it in order to learn the method of the great master; and, while he reads, marvels at the genius that could elevate so base a tale. The student reads it, but no other; yet its scenes have been followed, often with wonderful exactness, in the play of *Othello*. How has the dramatist accomplished this marvelous success?

His method is like that of the artist who picks up in the streets some common, inferior creature to be the model of a Madonna, a Cleopatra, an Apollo, or a bust of Plato. He needs a personality, as a scaffold, on which to build his art. No matter how common, how poor, the figure, the light of his imagination and the glamour of his art can so gild and adorn it that the common becomes superlative, and the poor, grand.

Through the dull brains of mediocre humanity, the master pours the quick fire of his own luminous soul. Bright pictures of imagination, the noblest and most subtle thoughts, appear in every conversation, and lend a charm to each utterance. His dramas present not the meeting of ordinary mortals, but of a group of Shakespeares who utter to each other their flashing fancies. Yet each character is true to nature; each character has a mind, an individuality of his own; but the soul of Shakespeare permeates every scene, and glimmers through each well-drawn personality. It is this that gives the plays of Shakespeare their brightest charm.

Othello appears before us; he has his own individuality; he has the burning passions of his fiery being, the simplicity and candour of an untutored, almost barbarous, nature; he has a generous credulity that makes him a ready believer in the faith of all; but, behind all this, his simple mind, his un-ordered thoughts, are lighted by the artistic cultivation and luxuriant imagination of Shakespeare. It is as though the fervent savage had, shining through his nature, the illumination of exquisite art; thus the passion of the man, while it pours forth unconscious of restraint, is beautified by continual flashes of noble and intellectual grace, lighting up his heroic but despairing soul.

So Desdemona comes, gentle, virtuous, confiding, an innocence that will not even believe in the existence of sin, a simplicity that shows itself in childlike trust of all; but through this gentle mind plays the same light of fervent fancy, more charming than even her virtuous simplicity.

It is the same with Iago, a dark plotter whose intricate thoughts are a snare to his own mind, a moral monster, but an intellectual prodigy; the basest of men, but still pervaded by such artistic fire of imagination that he compels admiration and interest; although his acts, when we escape from the fascination of the man, awaken in our moral natures only horror and anger. And so with all. Each scene is a cluster of jewels glittering in a ring; their luster so commingled that often we cannot tell which shines the brightest. The magic of Shakespeare's genius thrills, glows, and dances, in every line of this powerful and exquisite drama, giving the base acts, invented or recorded by the forgotten Cinthio, a glory and a luster that make them revelations.

In the play of *Hamlet* the story is no more Shakespeare's, than is that of *Othello*. There was an old *History of Hamlet* written by Saxo Grammaticus, a Dane, from which a play had been written

some years before 1590. The play is lost, but the story survives. In this are the circumstances of the murder of Hamlet's father by a brother, the speedy marriage of the latter to the widow of his victim, a simulated madness suggestive of Prince Hamlet's, the attempt to pluck out the heart of his mystery by over-hearing his conversation with a lady, the visit of the prince to his mother, the killing of the eavesdropper (Polonius of the play) behind the arras, even to Hamlet's exclamation, "a rat!" as he strikes the old counsellor—all this is set down in the story. There is also the same style of lecture by Hamlet to his mother upon her conduct, the mission to England, the circumstance of the alteration of letters in such manner as to accomplish the death of the two confidents of the king of Denmark, the return of the prince from England, and the punishment of the uncle by the sword of the nephew.

This story is even more crude than Cinthio's, and, like it, most tedious; yet, from it, Shakespeare has built the most intellectual production of our language. Whoever reads the *History of Hamlet*, as the old narrator tells it, will find a great number of the circumstances of Shakespeare's play, or hints that led to them; but he will find no ghost, no Horatio, no Laertes, no grave-diggers, no poetry. In transforming this antique tale into the play of *Hamlet*, the poet's art has effected such magical change as if a ghastly skeleton, hung up in the closet of an anatomical student, were rehabilitated with the vitality of life, and, with that vitality, were returned the rounding of the graceful limbs, the harmony of colours, the warmth of expression, the radiant beauty of a soul.

The play of *King Lear* is built upon legend and an older play, "*The History of King Leir and his three daughters*," in which is the scene of the division of the kingdom between the two daughters, Goneril and Regan, who extravagantly profess their love; there is the casting off by her father of the too-truthful Cordelia, the mar-

riage of the latter to the king of France, the ingratitude of Goneril and Regan, the despair of Lear, his meeting with Cordelia, the affectionate love of the latter, the battle between the forces of the king of France and those of Goneril and Regan, but in which the latter are defeated, and Lear reinstated in his kingdom. This old play is a very rude production, lacking alike beauty and art. It has no Fool, Edgar, Edmund, or Gloster; no crazed king; no poetry; but its main circumstances are followed through the scenes of Shakespeare's magnificent drama.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare follows the old chronicler, Holinshed, giving the scene of the two thanes and the three Weird Sisters, on the blasted heath, almost word for word from him. Our poet also follows the chronicle in its delineation of the character of Macbeth and his wife. Here he also found the murder of King Duncan, and that of Banquo with the escape of Fleance in the darkness, the taking of the castle of Macduff, the slaughter of his family, his flight to England, the prophecies to Macbeth by "a certain witch," "that he never should be slain with man born of any woman," nor vanquished "till the wood of Birnam came to the castle of Dunsinane." The scene of Malcome's self-accusations, to try the faith of Macduff, is also found here, the return of Malcome and Macduff with old Siward and ten thousand Englishmen, the cutting down of the branches of Birnam wood, and finally the scene upon the battle-field, where Macduff,—so says the chronicle,—tells the tyrant: "I am even he that thy wizards have told thee of, who was never born of my mother, but ripped out of her womb." After which, says the chronicle simply, "therewithal he stept unto him and slew him in the place."

Here are hints of all the supernatural machinery of the play of *Macbeth*, the characters are largely delineated, nor is the chronicle without a certain rude force and poetry. It is like a painter's palette:

the colours are there, but require the artist's hand and skill to lay their tints so nicely on the canvas that they may glow with life and beauty. This is what Shakespeare has done.

King Richard III is founded on an old play called *The true tragedy of Richard the Third;* but deviates very largely from this original, though sometimes copying closely, as for instance:

"*The battle, enter Richard, wounded, with his page.*

KING.

A horse, a horse, a fresh horse!

PAGE.

Fly, my lord, and save your life.

KING.

Fly, villain, look I as tho' I would fly?
No, first shall this dull and senseless ball
Of earth receive my body cold and void of sense"—

Shakespeare also follows in this play his favorite chronicler, Holinshed, sometimes using his words. A Latin play by Dr. Thomas Legge, called *Richardus Tertius*, was also extant in Shakespeare's time. *King Richard III* bears the same relation to these predecessors that *Othello* does to Cinthio's tale, or *Hamlet* to the old story of like name.

We might examine how his Roman plays follow North's English translation of Plutarch; and other of his dramas, the Italian novelists; but the examples already given are sufficient to show the general method of the great play-writer. He took down from their niches the dead figures of history or fable, and bade them live again, speak again, break the deep silence of death, and walk upon his magic stage, instinct with life and thought, and glowing with every thrill of their original passions. No dim or shadowy forms are these; but actual realities, clean-cut figures, vigorous, passionate mortals,

wearing man's glories and his errors, but all radiant with their creator's poetic imaginings.

Can we then deny to Shakespeare the name of a creator? He wakes to life the dead. From the wild struggle of the elements of human passion, unsightly perhaps in bare wickedness or sluggish virtue, he builds a thing of glorious life. His work is like the act of the fabled god, Prometheus, who breathed into the instincts of humanity the fire of Heaven, the conceptions and imaginations of a fervent intellect.

In all the creations of Shakespeare, we see the mind of their creator; as every creature must bear the impress of the power that formed its being. It is not that nature is drawn true to life, though it is so drawn; this might excite admiration of the skill of the limner, but would scarcely give us so much delight: it is that life is made beautiful and graceful with all the noblest and highest imaginings and desirings of humanity. Even the dark phases of human passion are made grandly magnificent by the poet's power of intellect and light of fancy, revealing, by their grandeur, the greatness of the powers thus perverted to evil.

As Milton's fallen angel shines with a lurid glory, the dying embers of former divine radiance, majestic and grand though a representative spirit of ill; so Shakespeare's Gloster and Iago are magnificent in their iniquity; crowned with powers of intellect, their wicked natures rise out of the level of common men, proudly conspicuous, as the bold peak of some fire-vomiting mountain lifts itself above the fruitful fields and fertile valleys that surround it.

Nor, while thus putting a crown on vice, does the poet fail to teach lessons of morality; for he ever surrounds such crowned evil with grim terrors, natural or supernatural—terrors arising from violated conscience within, or wronged humanity without. He so exhibits the destruction of every hope resting on a dishonest or wicked

foundation, that each play, each several character even, is a sermon teaching the doctrine that no power of intellect, however great, can conduct an evil course to a prosperous end—that, high over all the affairs of men, sits enthroned an "even-handed justice" which cannot be cheated or evaded, dealing out fit punishment to crime in spite of every device of cunning evil.

This lesson of morality is taught not only by the tragic ending of Gloster's career on Bosworth field, but by the suspicion that haunts his life, making painful his golden crown, and pointing to an avenger in every seeming friend—by the lonely desolation of his heart, prompting to such sad utterance as this:

> "There is no creature loves me;
> And if I die, no soul shall pity me;"

and by the ghostly dreams that come to threaten and to torture, making his sleep no rest, but agony beyond all physical suffering.

The murderer, Macbeth, finds likewise a more dreadful retribution in the persecutions of conscience, and in the haunting spectre of "the blood-bolter'd Banquo," than in the sharp edge of Macduff's avenging sword. His guilty ambition has set him on a throne, from which gilded seat goes up his cry of disappointment and despair:

> "I have lived long enough: my way of life
> Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have; but in their stead
> Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breath,
> Which the poor heart would fain deny, but dare not."

Even in the case of the amusing debauchee, Sir John Falstaff, an avenging Nemesis points out to him how his dissolute career has robbed him of the honors and fortune due to his large ability and active intellect. When this speaker of many witticisms, in the hour

when he hopes for some large reward as payment for the amusement he has given his prince, is met with this reproach from his former boon-companion, now King Henry V,

> "I know thee not, old man; fall to thy prayers;
> How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!"

what witty answer can he make? None. There is no more left for the once gay reveller, but to end his wasted life, lonely and disappointed, in that very inn, the Boar's Head in Eastcheap, the scene of so many jolly festivities; but where his last scene is most solemnly dismal, and where his last friend is the poor woman he has basely cheated, but whose simple, kind heart is much moved by womanly compassion at his last hours; and who tells the story of his dying in illiterate, but touching, language, thus:

"He's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end, and went away, an it had been any christom child; 'a parted ev'n just between twelve and one, ev'n at the turning o' the tide; for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his finger's end, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. 'How now, Sir John?' quoth I: 'what, man! be of good cheer.' So 'a cried out—'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him 'a should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet; I put my hand into the bed, and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so upward, and upward, and all was as cold as any stone."

So while we examine, much enjoying, these dramas, we are constantly learning lessons of philosophy, of morality. The stories, the events on which they are built, are of no importance; the char-

acters even, though often so largely drawn as to rise beyond our limits of measure, are things of secondary interest; but the bright imaginings, the large conceptions, the great moral and philosophical truths, that reveal the broad and brilliant mind of Shakespeare—these open to us fields of thought and fancy, so vast and beautiful, that we may wander there delighted, meeting constant agreeable surprises, and finding always new pleasures.

Comparison of Shakespeare with other authors always brings into conspicuous notice the power of our great poet in the use of language. Bright images of fancy, original conceptions of beauty and of truth, must not only exist in the mind of a poet, but find in his language such expression that their picturing will stand out in vivid distinctness, and with such marked outlines as to fix attention and compel remembrance.

It has been often said that we are all, to ourselves, poets; that is, we have times when the beautiful in nature, or in ideal, appeals to us with a mingling of soul and sense, and fills our admiring minds with graceful shapes and harmonious thoughts. It is as if an inspiration filled us from the original source of truth and beauty. This we are conscious of; but if we would describe it, and present it to other minds, the figures and the thoughts defy our power to fix them into permanent characters, or set them down in words, unless the gift of expression belongs to us.

The capacity to comprehend poetry, to feel the inspiration and visiting of poetic images, is almost universal; but ability to give exact form and characteristic expression in words, or in artistic representation, to such pictures, is rare. Perhaps the largest conceptions of beauty by the human mind have been lost to the world by lack of power of expression to fully show them. They have delighted the single mind which they filled with their grace or their grandeur, but beyond which they could not pass in their perfection. The *Jupiter*

of Phidias, the *Virgin* of Raphael, the *Hamlet* of Shakespeare, though each a masterpiece, appeared, doubtless, to either artist, an imperfect delineation of the ideal which each sought to portray.

Language is a means by which the mind strives to exhibit itself; but it is a means never perfect: with the most skilful it falls far short of absolute accuracy; and when the skill is little, the exhibition is very imperfect. Whom the world calls poets, are those that can portray what the many are conscious of, see, feel, and think, but cannot express; and these poets are greater or less according to their skill to make themselves the exponents of the minds of men, and picture more or less accurately the thoughts, the visions, the imaginings, that come alike to all. It is because we recognize in poetic images something that has existence in ourselves, that poetry appeals so universally to the minds of men. That poet whose thoughts or fancies are so very abstruse or original as to belong only to himself, will have no power to affect or interest his fellow men.

I have said poetry is common to mankind; the lowest intellects are often capable of being more moved by it than higher organizations, simply because the poet, for the moment, shows them, by the magic sympathy of mind with mind, pictures that pertain to an intellectuality above their own, by the which enlarging of their mental horizon they are filled with rapture. This faculty of expression, —showing the greatness and the splendor of the powers and possibilities that exist almost unconsciously within us; for in the poet's pictures we recognize familiar features,—constitutes one great element of the genius of a poet. In Shakespeare this power seems equally matched with the conceptions whose graceful forms, force, and brilliance, it exhibits. To illustrate would be superfluous; for the affluence, power, sweetness, and truth, of his language appeal at once to every mind capable of receiving such impressions. To such, if such there be, who cannot perceive the force and grace of ex-

pression that belong to him, no labored efforts to exhibit these would avail anything; for to them language is a thing of words only.

In considering the genius of a dramatist, we should not neglect to examine the circumstances attending the construction of his plays, and the purpose for which they were written. Whether his intent was to give to the world, under cover of such plays, certain philosophical views or theories, or simply to present thrilling pictures of life embellished with whatever of philosophy might be latent or active in his mind, would require a different analysis, and would present the plays in a different light, in either case.

From our knowledge, though meagre, of the life of Shakespeare, we are led to believe that he was no slow, long-pondering philosopher, meditating for years over original conceptions, or historic theories, of life; but rather one whose temperament and circumstances compelled him to more hurried compositions than were suitable to the development of philosophy, as such simply. But in our poet's plays, nevertheless, the profound wisdom that comes of a broad intellect rather than of learned and labored thought, is everywhere apparent; and life so clothed in its true garb and colors, men's actions everywhere so accurately referred, each to its exciting cause in passion, hope, desire, love, fear, aspiration, or faith—all elements of our common nature—that his pictures of life, though their stories are now trite, appeal to us with the same force of truth and wisdom that they had for those to whom their life-like scenes were first displayed. This truth of portrayal is shown in that the lapse of nearly three hundred years has afforded no deeper knowledge of the heart, our broad array of classified facts given no clearer insight into the working of human nature, than had the "Bard of Avon" when he wrote his famous plays for the London stage. But not, perhaps, for truths' sake did he write them, not for the sake of their philoso-

phy; but for the purpose of bringing to his theatre a thronging audience.

Does this lessen the poet? Not at all. A poet is a man, and must be fed. Connected with the brain and the heart there is a stomach. It is the thought of a sentimentalist that abstracts the poetic mind from the living needs and natural desires of men.

Thus the most profound philosophy of the human mind and heart, which generation after generation, each more clearly than its predecessor, has recognized as truth, was given to the world in the embellishment of certain plays; for the production of which, the first and moving purpose was desire in the heart of a poor and obscure actor to place the Shakespeare family in a position of more comfort and higher social standing—to enable this quandam deer-stealer and glove-maker to buy the best mansion in his native town, and to decorate his father, the honest yeoman and bailiff, with the high dignity of a coat of arms. These, so far as we have means to ascertain, were the motives that prompted his brain to the large conceptions contained in the plays of *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*.

At an age more mature than the whole life of Shakespeare, Goethe, the most profound thinker and greatest literary genius of Germany, commenced to write the play of *Faust*, the second part of which was concluded when its author was in the eighty-second year of his age. This dramatic poem,—over which his mind is said to have brooded for thirty years before its first line was written, and which he and his admirers deemed his crowning masterpiece,—contains a strange mingling of all the philosophic speculations and contemplative musings of his life. Dreamy philosophy, uncertain morality, and unprofitable speculation, are the objects of the poet's work; his drama but the dress, the embellishment, of his theme. As a drama, his work is a failure; as a poem, a success in so far as the adornments of fancy and the charms of powerful and graceful ex-

pression can so constitute it; but in its first purpose, the delineation of the philosophy of life, it is unsatisfactory, vague, and contradictory, affording no certain help to the minds of men. In this respect it is most unlike Shakespeare's greater plays, where a broad comprehension and well-defined system of morality illustrate, with the clear light of truth, a sure and safe path through the world's ways, that all who read may see, and so guide their steps. The play of *Faust* is exampled here to show, by its contrast in purpose with the plays of Shakespeare, how differing circumstances and such different purpose of authors have claims for consideration in the analyses of their works.

Shakespeare's genius was that of a play-writer, though his plays exhibit the wisdom and the power of a many-sided mind that grasped, as by intuition, great truths which succeeding years and modern research have but developed and amplified, not changed; and gave them, wrought by his poetry into imperishable characters, to the world.

Goethe's genius was that of a philosopher who, seeking to publish his speculative thought, used the embellishment of dramatic action to exhibit what he deemed abstract and moral truths, but which succeeding philosophy has refused to verify. Though failing as a philosopher, his success as a poet has gained for him the laurel crown which his learned speculations failed to win.

By the help of the hypothesis, warranted by all the facts that have come down to us, that Shakespeare's chief and actuating purpose in the construction of his dramas was to produce successful plays, we are enabled to understand many points that are obscure under any other view. To show how this purpose of the author should influence our understanding and analysis of his works, let us take the example of a single character. The question has been often raised, why Shakespeare permitted misfortune to overwhelm the virt-

uous Desdemona, who seems to have deserved a better fate than the calamities that so soon destroyed her young and innocent life.

It has been urged that her misfortunes are attributable to her error in making a match between unmatchable races; or that it was because of her disobedience to her parent that she suffered. Both of these are insufficient reasons: the first, because we can easily see that the same calamity might have occurred if her husband had been a Venetian; and the second, because the same fate might have overtaken her if she had married with the full approbation of her father. The obvious reason why the play so presents the destruction of this innocent being, is that such was the circumstance of the story on which the drama was built; and Shakespeare's comprehension of human nature enabled him to perceive how he could exhibit the working of intrigue, suspicion, and passion, under the circumstances of that story, in such way that the death of the sweet lady would be a natural result, while her very innocence would give his art the means to enlist in her sad fate, most completely, the hearts of his audience. In so far as poetical justice, logical or ethical right, call for a different result, he paid no attention to such demands; perceiving how often in life, poetical justice, logical or ethical right, are not apparent within those limits in which we see life, and within which the drama is placed.

Shakespeare's genius combines in one grasp the several powers of the artist, the philosopher, and the poet.

As an artist, he knew how to delineate each character so that its effect upon surrounding characters, and in the play, should be in perfect accord, and also in harmony with nature. He knew how to contrast character with character so that their contact might render more apparent the peculiar excellence of each, as the painter makes his tints more brilliant and effective by skilful regard to complimentary colors. He knew how to so group and present his characters and scenes to

produce the strongest dramatic effects. He knew how to invest every character with a peculiar grace that should lend its charm to beautify even the commonplace.

His philosophy is broad and comprehensive, but generous and kind. It looks through the shams of the world, with pity for folly and weakness, but ever with a lash for vice. It fathoms the heart of the monarch, the mind of the slave, and the intricate brain of the intellectual schemer and man of meditative thought. No degree of mental power is beyond its measure; no lack of intellect below its comprehension. The capricious and subtle thinkings of Hamlet, the passionate frenzy of Othello, the crooked intrigues of Iago, the insane wanderings of Lear, the guilty conscience-questionings of Macbeth, the muddy and grovelling instincts of Caliban, are all traced with the same large comprehension of the differing phases of various humanity, the same unerring fidelity to the truths of our common nature.

The great problems of life and death, he wisely reviewed and investigated with so little prejudice or bias from the current teaching and opinions of his time, that we wonder how he could have reached that sublime height, from which he looked down so calmly on his fellow men. Modern science reveals the immensity of matter, the infinity of its laws, and the intricate relations it bears to life; thus presenting a picture of nature, very different from the one presented in Shakespeare's day by the less advanced condition of scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, what modern writer can draw a truer or more expressive picture of the life of man, in its relation to time and matter, than Shakespeare, in his fifth act of Macbeth?

> "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more; it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing."

Or when Hamlet says?

"And a man's life's no more than to say 'One.'"

We must remember these lines were written when public opinion still held that the universe was made expressly for man, and our earth its centre; thirty years, perhaps, before the day when Galileo, clothed in sackcloth, was compelled to kneel at Rome, and, with all formality, make abjuration of the Copernican theory of the Solar system.

Nor must we suppose, in the lines last quoted, that Shakespeare's characters intend to ignore man's immorality: the reference is simply to the duration of organic being, that which is called life, and which intellect attempts to measure by the symbol, time; the purpose of the lines being, to express man's insignificance and the narrow boundries beyond which we can look only by the light of faith, imagination, or the natural instincts of the soul.

Our poet's large philosophy, thus anticipating the progress of the world, shines out from his various characters with a steady and revealing light, by which we see far deeper in the minds and hearts of men, into each mingling of sense and thought that constitutes an identity, than by our own unaided light of intellect we have the power to penetrate. Nor has the world, in its three centuries, yet progressed beyond the standpoint from which Shakespeare viewed life and man: in fact the mass of mankind are, in this respect, far—far beneath the platform on which he stood.

Leaving now the poetry of art and philosophy, for the realm of fancy and uncurbed imagination, we find our author soaring on the broadest and swiftest wing: bidding us follow the flight of his grand and beautiful imagining beyond the bounds that circle in the world of ordinary thought; with Ariel

"To ride
On the curl'd clouds."

With Oberon and Puck to listen to

> "A mermaid on a dolphin's back
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song:
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,"
> To hear the sea-maids music"—

With queen Titania dance in the moonlight round her fairy ring, or with her elves

> "Kill cankers in the musk-rose buds;
> Make war with rear-mice for their leathern wings
> To make the small elves coats;"

or watch the puny beings, while they

> "Keep back
> The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots, and wonders
> At the quaint spirits."

Descend with Prospero on the enchanted island, and behold

> "The foul witch Sycorax, who, with age and envy,
> Was grown into a hoop."

Go with Macbeth upon the blasted heath, and meet the Weird Sisters; hear their shrieking prophecies, and behold them vanish

> "Into the air; and what seemed corporal melt
> As breath into the wind."

See them

> "Round about the cauldron go;
> In the poison'd entrails throw."

Hear their horrible refrain,

> "Double, double toil and trouble;
> Fire burn, and cauldron bubble."

Then grope darkly in the dread cavern, and look upon the magical showing of the crowned progeny of Banquo. Thus to chase a myr-

iad fancies through a multitude of scenes, excited by turns to wonder, admiration, fear, pity, sorrow, and laughter. But why attempt any enumeration of the countless beauties of Shakespeare's imagination? Do they not shine upon the pages of his immortal plays, there to survive so long as our language survives; to raise, to instruct, and to delight, the men and women of the future; as they have raised, instructed, and delighted, the men and women of the past.

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